

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections**1. Name**

historic Saunders School (D009:0323-021)

and or common Saunders School

2. Location

street & number 415 North 41st Avenue

N/A not for publication

city, town Omaha

N/A vicinity of

state

Nebraska

code

031

county

Douglas

code

055

3. Classification

Category

☐ district☒ building(s)☐ structure☐ site☐ object

Ownership

☐ public☒ private☐ both

Public Acquisition

N/A in process

☐ being considered

Status

☐ occupied☒ unoccupied☐ work in progress

Accessible

☒ yes: restricted☐ yes: unrestricted☐ no

Present Use

☐ agriculture☐ commercial☐ educational☐ entertainment☐ government☐ industrial☐ military☐ museum☐ park☐ private residence☐ religious☐ scientific☐ transportation☒ other: Vacant**4. Owner of Property**

name Steven P. Rumbaugh

street & number 4916 Cass Street

city, town Omaha

N/A vicinity of

state Nebraska 68132

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Register of Deeds, Omaha/Douglas Civic Center

street & number 1819 Farnam Street

city, town Omaha

state Nebraska

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title 1984 Omaha/Douglas County

Historic Building Survey

has this property been determined eligible? ☐ yes ☒ no

date 1984-ongoing

☐ federal ☐ state ☐ county ☒ local

depository for survey records Omaha City Planning Department & Nebraska State Historical Society

city, town Omaha/Lincoln

state Nebraska

7. Description

Condition

☐ excellent
☒ good
☐ fair

☐ deteriorated
☐ ruins
☐ unexposed

Check one

☐ unaltered
☒ altered

Check one

☒ original site
☐ moved

date N/A

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

A two-story brick structure over a raised basement, Saunders School was built as a ten-classroom grammar school facility in 1899. Interior and exterior masonry walls support the structure which is rectangular in plan; wood rafters and timber trusses bear the shingled roof. Stylistically the building exhibits a number of Romanesque revival elements, however, neo-classically derived features predominate in form, detail and overall effect. Located on a two-thirds acre site in a residential neighborhood, the building's structural and architectural integrity remains very good.

Saunders School is situated on a .7 acre site bordered by Cass Street on the north, 41st Avenue on the west and by private residential property on the east and south. The two-story brick structure constructed in 1899 as a grammar school facility fronts along 41st Avenue on a slightly elevated rise in close proximity with the street. Asphalt playground and parking areas surround the structure.

Two separate one-story annexes have been appended to the north: an early frame addition contains a small gymnasium and stage; a brick structure erected in 1974 between the frame annex and 41st Avenue houses a kitchen and cafeteria. Egress to the gymnasium is up through an enclosed stairway at basement level. An enclosed corridor leading down from the main structure's first floor permits access to the food service annex.

The principal building, measuring 106' x 68', consists of two stories over a raised basement. Rectangular in plan, the structure is covered by a hipped roof, originally slate, now shingled. A hipped-roof frame dormer is centered on the roof's front slope. Two gabled pavilions divide the facade into a three-part arrangement, with a one-story arcaded entrance dominating the center bay. The rear elevation features a gabled center pavilion with egress at basement level. Except for a basement entrance on the south and a reversed window grouping arrangement, side elevations are identical as originally planned; subsequent construction has altered the building's north face.

Enclosed by arched vaults, the building's two main entrances each open to stairways providing vertical circulation: down to lavatories, mechanical and general purpose areas; up to classroom and office space on the first and second floors. In plan, the first and second floors are exactly alike. On each floor, a large central hall services five classrooms with adjacent wardrobes for each classroom and an office area defined in the space separating the stairwells.

A noteworthy feature of the structure is its fenestration. In the four corner classrooms on both floors, the larger outside wall expanse contains five double-hung windows while the shorter wall has two. All five wardrobe corridors also contain one window. In elevation, this configuration results in groups of six and ten windows which alternately shift around the area of the facade corresponding to the corner classrooms. The orientation of blackboards combined with the light level factor in the classrooms might suggest a rationale for this pattern of window placement. Whatever the architect's purpose, this arrangement breaks the symmetry of the elevations and is particularly apparent on the otherwise balanced front facade, where the pavilions—evenly matched in scale and detail—contain unequal numbers of windows. Saunders is not the only schoolhouse in which Latenser employed this fenestration pattern: it occurs in Center and Columbian, as well as in plans for a number of school buildings no longer extant.

Technically the building utilizes a system of interior and exterior load-bearing solid masonry walls on stepped footings. Wood joists (2 x 12's, 3 x 14's and 3 x 16's) span between bearing walls to structure floors covered by 2" wide maple strip flooring. Concrete slab and brick pavement form the basement floor. A hybrid system comprised of dimensioned wood rafters and timber trusses supports the roof.

(continued)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

Continuation sheet

Description

Item number

7

Page

1

Stylistically the building incorporates a number of elements sympathetic with the late 19th century Romanesque revival, specifically, the arched windows on the second story with pronounced archivolt trim and a molded impost course. Other evidence of the style is seen in the vaulted door openings. Like many of the buildings of H. H. Richardson — an important interpreter of the Romanesque revival style — the structure is sheltered by a high hipped roof.

Predominating in form and detail, however, are more classically inspired features. Enriched with pressed-metal block modillions, the cornice carries across both gable ends on the front facade forming twin pediments. Sandstone keystones ornament round windows centered in each of the tympanums. Modillions are also used on the gables' raking cornices and on the cornice of the roof dormer. An architrave supported by four brick pilasters frames the entrance and bears the school's name and date (18 Saunders School 99). Carved sandstone trims the window sills and also the pilasters' stylized ionic capitals and bases. The raised first floor—reminiscent of Roman temple design—is emphasized by a pronounced sandstone water table and further suggests classical sources for the building's architectural form.

Several examples of loosely adapted classical detail are also carried into the interior. Dentil-like cutouts adorn the pressed-metal ceiling in the entrance areas. The panels and moldings of the stairways' strings and newel posts also enhance the effect. Other interior features include: decorative pressed-metal ceilings in classrooms, hallways and stairwells; maple wainscoting and oak trim in classrooms, hallways and corridors; marble parquet floors in entrance areas; original door plates and knobs decorated with an Art Nouveau floral motif; and balustrades executed in the Eastlake style.

Though Saunders School has been unoccupied for more than a year, the architectural and structural integrity of the building remains very good. Both the exterior and interior have stood up well to more than 80 years of continuous use. While the original interior remains virtually intact, only the absence of brick chimneys and the addition of annexes to the north have altered the building's exterior form and appearance.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1899 **Builder/Architect** John Latenser, Sr.; Architect

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Opened to students in 1900, Saunders School remains as one of the earliest extant examples of schoolhouse design by John Latenser, Sr. The Omaha architect built his reputation on designs for more than 20 of the City's public school facilities, and later completed commissions for many of Omaha's larger civic and commercial building projects. Saunders School represents a transitional phase in Latenser's work. The building exhibits features of the architect's earlier experiments in the Richardsonian Romanesque style, but more strongly shows his predilection for classically-inspired revival styles, an interest which he would continue to develop in his more mature work. The integrity of the structure—its appealing design and efficient interior plan—attests not only to Latenser's skill, but also reflects the community's commitment in providing effective and attractive settings for educating its children.

Omaha Public School authorities purchased the site for Saunders School in what was then known as the Davenport district at 41st Avenue and Cass Street during the 1898-99 school year. The district's attendance area initially extended from 34th Street on the east to the City limits on the west, and from Cuming on the north to Farnam on the south. (Omaha Public Schools, Annual Report of the Board of Education, 1900, p. 141)

Settlement had started in the area in 1882 with the establishment of Sacred Heart Convent at 36th and Burt, and beginning in 1901, the planning and construction of St. Cecilia's Cathedral at 40th and Burt spurred middle and upper-middle class residential development along the district's northern margin. Also at the turn of the century, many of the City's wealthy and prominent citizens built homes in what was then called the West Farnam area. A portion of this "gold coast" neighborhood was included in the district, extending along north 38th Street from Dodge to Cuming. (Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission, A Comprehensive Program for Historic Preservation in Omaha, pp. 44-45.)

As was the Board of Education's practice, schools were generally named for the street on which they were situated, or for persons who had made significant contributions to the City in the areas of commerce, government or education. The new school at 41st Avenue and Cass had been referred to as Davenport School until its construction was nearly complete. The name had been transferred from the small frame building at 38th and Davenport which had been leased for classes. Before the new facility was opened to students, the school was renamed to commemorate the achievements of Alvin Saunders. (Omaha Public Schools Department of Public Information, History of Saunders School, p. 1.)

Though now primarily remembered as Nebraska's final territorial governor before statehood in 1867 and as a U.S. Senator from 1877 to 1883, Alvin Saunders (1815-1899) also played an important role in the formation of Omaha's school system. He was appointed by the governor to the Board of Regents of the City's high school and served as president of that group. In 1872 when legislation established Omaha's unified board of education with members elected by wards, Saunders was voted in as one of the reorganized board's initial members. (Savage and Bell, The History of Omaha and South Omaha, pp. 577-579.)

(continued)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only
received
date entered

Continuation sheet	Significance	Item number	8	Page	1
--------------------	--------------	-------------	---	------	---

Plans for the design of Saunders School were presented to the Board of Education by the architect John Latenser and were approved in April of 1899. Completed at a cost of approximately \$34,000, the school was opened for classes in the fall of 1900 with 272 students registered in its first year of operation. (Omaha Public Schools, Annual Report of the Board of Education, 1900, 1901) Latenser had designed Webster school—his first facility for the Omaha school district—in 1888 and in 1892 was salaried as the district's staff architect. This relationship appears to have continued intermittantly for more than a dozen years; subsequently, Latenser produced plans for the district on a contractual basis into the 1920's. Although an exact count of his school buildings is difficult to determine, one source credits Latenser with designs for at least 20 of the City's public school facilities. (Wakeley, Omaha: The Gate City, Vol. II., p. 35.)

Born into a family of architects in Lichtenstein, John Latenser, Sr. (1858-1936) emmigrated to the U. S. after completing studies in architecture at the Polytechnic College in Stuttgart. For seven years he was employed as a draftsman in Chicago before setting up an architectural practice in Omaha in 1887. Latenser's Omaha practice spanned more than 50 years and included commissions for many of the City's larger civic and commercial building projects, including Central High School (NRHP, 1979) the Douglas County Courthouse (NRHP, 1979), and the J. L. Brandeis and Sons Store Building (NRHP, 1982). In addition, Latenser served as construction superintendent for Omaha's Federal Post Office building beginning in 1891 and two years later was named Superintendent of Federal Building for a six-state territory. (Omaha Bee News, 9 December 1934; Omaha World Herald, 7 October, 1936.)

Early in his career, Latenser received a commendation from the U. S. government for solving serious structural problems in Chicago's Federal Post Office Building. The architect's technical skills were also recognized by the Omaha School Board. Newly arrived in the City, Latenser won his first contract for the design of Webster School by pointing out inadequacies in plans offered by 18 other competitors. (Omaha World-Herald, 7 October, 1936.)

School district annual reports from the 1870's, 80's and 90's reveal the Board of Education's emphasis on the importance of "pure air, scientific lighting, (and) sanitary conditions" as requisites for its buildings. Because compulsory attendance was neither strenuously legislated nor enforced until after the turn of the century, local school authorities realized that safe, attractive, well ventilated and illuminated facilities were needed to gain widespread public support and insure student attendance. In Latenser, the Board found an architect who could carry out its specifications. Board president Clinton N. Powell in a report for the year ending 1893 states:

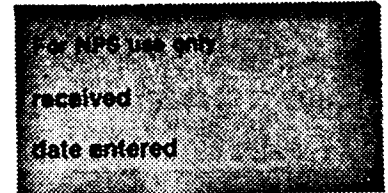
"In construction, arrangement, lighting, facilities for heating and ventilation and all that goes to make up perfect buildings for school purposes, I believe these cannot be excelled by an equal number of buildings in any other city. . .For the excellence of these buildings credit is chiefly due to John Latenser, Esq. . ."

(Omaha Public Schools, Annual Report of the Board of Education, 1893)

(continued)

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet

Significance

Item number 8

Page 2

Of Latenser's extant school buildings — Train, Center and Central High School, for example — the fact that original interior and exterior plans remain essentially unaltered further testifies to the architect's expertise in schoolhouse design.

In terms of style, Saunders School represents a transitional phase in Latenser's work, a shift away from Romanesque revival forms toward a more classically inspired aesthetic. Several earlier schoolhouse projects such as Train, Center and, especially, Columbian show the architect's experimentation with the building style developed by Henry Hobson Richardson, a popular source for architects in the midwest in the late 19th century. In these examples, the presence of round arches framing door and window openings, gable ends carried up to form parapets and high hipped roofs typifies the Richardsonian Romanesque.

In the Saunders building, Latenser also incorporated similar Richardsonian elements, specifically, the arcaded entrance and the round-arched windows on the second story. Dominant in the design, however, are more classically inspired features. The pedimented gables, engaged columns supporting an architrave framing the entrance, and the raised basement are more rooted in the stylistic traditions of Greece, Rome and the Italian Renaissance.

Neo-classical revival styles became a popular idiom for Omaha architects and builders with the opening of the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition in 1898. John Latenser was responsible for the design of one of the fair's most prominent structures, the government building. (Omaha World-Herald, 31 January 1943) In keeping with the Beaux-Arts tradition of exposition architecture established by the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Latenser modeled his building on a Renaissance palazzo. (Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission, Patterns on the Landscape: Heritage Conservation in North Omaha, p. 80.)

Presumably influenced by this work for the exposition, Latenser worked on designs for Cass and Pacific Schools (both non-extant) concurrently with the Saunders building beginning in 1899. Photographs show a strong stylistic unity between the three structures based on similar neo-classical form and detail. It is clear that by 1900, Latenser had established the direction of his later work: he would continue to adapt variations of classically inspired styles throughout his career ranging from the Second Renaissance style of Central High School (1900) to the Beau-Art classicism of the University of Nebraska Hospital (1916).

As part of a district-wide building consolidation program, Saunders School was closed by the Board of Education in 1984. In its final years, the school served about 100 students in kindergarten through the sixth grade and also housed the district's staff library.

9. Major Bibliographical References

(See Continuation Sheet)

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property Less than one

Quadrangle name Omaha North, Nebr.—Iowa

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A 15 250820 4572060
Zone Easting Northing

B
Zone Easting Northing

C

D

E

F

G

H

Verbal boundary description and justification

The north 41.3 ft. of Lot 8 and all Lot 9, to and including Lot 14, Block 18, Poppleton Park, an addition to the City of Omaha, Douglas County, Nebraska, comprising all of the historically associated real estate.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
N/A			

state	code	county	code
N/A			

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Lynn Bjorkman, City Planner

organization Omaha City Planning Department

date June, 1985

street & number 1819 Farnam Street, Suite 1110

telephone (402) 444-5208

city or town Omaha

state Nebraska 68183

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

 national state X local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title Director, Nebraska State Historical Society

date February 4, 1986

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only
received
date entered

Continuation sheet Bibliography Item number 9 Page 1

Blumenson, John, J.—G. Identifying American Architecture. New York: W. W. Norton Company, Inc., 1981.

Kidd, Daniel. "Omaha High School." National Register of Historic Places, Inventory-Nomination Form, Lincoln: Nebraska State Historical Society, 1979.

Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission. A Comprehensive Program for Historic Preservation in Omaha. Omaha: Omaha City Planning Department, 1980.

Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission. Patterns on the Landscape: Heritage Conservation in North Omaha. Omaha: Omaha City Planning Department, Report No. 223, 1984.

Maddex, Diane, ed. Built in the U.S.A.: American Buildings from Airports to Zoos. Washington: The Preservation Press, 1985.

Meyer, Lynn. "Lincoln (Center) School." National Register of Historic Places, Inventory—Nomination Form. Lincoln: Nebraska State Historical Society, 1985.

Omaha Bee News. 9 December 1934.

Omaha Public Schools. Annual Report of the Board of Education, 1893, 1898, 1899, 1900 and 1901.

Omaha Public Schools, Department of Public Information. History of Saunders School. (Type-written.)

Omaha World-Herald. 7 October 1936; 31 January 1943.

Savage, James W. and Bell, John T. History of the City of Omaha, Nebraska and South Omaha. New York and Chicago: Munsell and Company, 1984.

Wakely, Arthur C., ed. Omaha: The Gate City and Douglas County, Nebraska. Chicago: Clarke Publishing Company, 1917.

Whiffen, Marcus and Koeper, Frederick. American Architecture: 1607-1976. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1981.



Photo 1 of 4—looking southeast at principal (west) façade. Photo by Lynn Meyer, 1985, Omaha City Planning Department.



Photo 2 of 4—main entry. Photo by Lynn Meyer, 1985, Omaha City Planning Department



Photo 3 of 4—hallway, main floor. Photo by Lynn Meyer, 1985, Omaha City Planning Department.



Photo 4 of 4—stair detail. Photo by Lynn Meyer, 1985, Omaha City Planning Department.